

# **School-Parent-Community Partnerships: The Experience of Teachers Who Received the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine and understand the school-parents-community partnerships created by teachers who received the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education. This study analyzes the applications of the 28 teachers who received the Award in 2007 and addresses three questions: How do teachers who received the Queen Rania Award communicate with parents and the broader community? What kinds of voluntary work do teachers who received the Award pursue inside and outside the school? And, How do teachers who received the Award encourage students to be more aware of social and community issues and then motivate students to be involved in the community? The findings of the study show that teachers connect with parents and the community in five ways: (1) communicating with parents, (2) involving parents in the learning process, (3) involving the community in the school, (4) pursuing volunteer projects, and (5) involving students in the community. Each of these categories are divided into several themes that represent ways to connect with parents and the community.

**Key Words:** schools, parents, community, partnerships, teachers, excellence, Queen Rania Award, education, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, promising practices, collaboration, educators, communication, involvement, students

## Introduction

Jordan is a small, middle-income country with a narrow natural resource base, water scarcity, limited oil resources, a small domestic market, and a predominantly young population. It is located in a region where political and security upheavals have had severe repercussions on the country's development. With 5.6 million inhabitants, Jordan has one of the youngest populations among lower-middle income countries – 38% of the population is under the age of 14. The relatively comfortable economic situation that Jordanians enjoy today can be credited to the Kingdom's ability to maintain social and political stability, but also depends on one of the world's highest shares of unilateral transfers, in the form of workers' remittances and public grants. Jordan has invested heavily in its education system and in its human resources and for decades has been a major supplier of skilled, educated, and trained workers to the countries in the region. This investment was recounted recently in the 2008 World Banks' report, "The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa." Based on this report, Jordan has the region's best education system in terms of access, equity, efficiency, and quality.

Based on the 2008 regional review of the "Education for All" report (UNESCO, 2008), Jordan has the second highest adult (15 and over) literacy rate among the Arab states. The total literacy rate is estimated to be 91%. It was only outperformed by Kuwait, which has a 93% literacy rate. However, Jordan's males have the highest rate (94.4%) among all the Arab states. The report also showed that Jordan had achieved a gender parity goal in both primary and secondary education by 2005. Jordan has a Gender Parity Index of 1.01. Finally, on the Education for All Development Index (EDI), Jordan has the second highest EDI (0.947) among the Arab states.

Over the past five years, Jordan has shown a clear and aggressive commitment towards education reform. The government has adopted a system-wide comprehensive plan titled Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ERfKE). This reform initiative was launched in 2003. The first phase ended in 2008, and the second phase (ERfKE II) is beginning in 2009. This project is the first of its kind in the region. Four major components were identified in ERfKE I, namely: (1) reorienting education policy objectives and strategies and reforming governance and administrative systems; (2) transforming education programs and practices to achieve learning outcomes relevant to the knowledge economy; (3) supporting the provision of quality physical learning environments; and, importantly, (4) promoting learning readiness through expanded early childhood education. This reform has involved a public-private partnership with many local and international organizations, donors, and

companies supporting Jordan's efforts. The major contributors are the World Bank, USAID, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Microsoft, and Cisco. The reform agenda recognized the role of teachers and perceives them as the true engineers and engines for change amid this reform. This recognition was translated into several initiatives for teacher professional development, including introducing a system of promotion for teachers and training teachers in information and communication technology.

The most visible initiative that indicates the attention given to teachers is the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education<sup>1</sup> (QRA). The Award was launched by His Majesty King Abdullah in 2005 in observance of World Teachers' Day. The vision of the Award is to raise the bar of excellence in education by measuring, advancing, rewarding, and honoring merit and achievement in teaching. The Award objectives are to develop and implement sustainable award systems according to international best practices, which

- pay respect to the profession,
- select the best teachers and schools based on objective, fair, and transparent criteria that are easily understood by all,
- become a strategy for teachers and schools to follow in their paths towards excellence, and
- enable exchange of innovative ideas and best practices.

Only public school teachers are eligible to apply. The first year (2006), the Award received 1,126 applications, while in the second round (2007), it received 1,309 applications.

Although it is still early to evaluate the impact of the Award on nurturing a culture of excellence, so far it is increasingly getting the attention of teachers and other educators and becoming a prestigious Award that motivates teachers to excel. According to a 2006 winner, "Such an award uplifts the morale of all teachers, because this way they will be motivated to excel to be like their peers who won the Award" (Abu Aridah, quoted in the *Jordan Times*, 2006). The winners participate in local, regional, and international conferences. Special programs for professional development and follow up are organized for the winners by the Award's administration in coordination with the Ministry of Education. In addition to these professional development opportunities, winners receive other incentives. First place winners in each of the five categories receive 3,000 Jordanian Dinar,<sup>2</sup> a plaque, and letter of appreciation, and they are also promoted on the civil service scale and get extra points, enabling them to compete for the position of educational supervisor. Second place winners receive 1,500 Jordanian Dinar; those in third receive 500 Jordanian Dinar.

Teachers who apply for the Award are evaluated on these nine standards:

1. Teachers' personal philosophy and values;
2. Teaching effectiveness;
3. Resource management;
4. Professional development;
5. Relationship with community and parents;
6. Work relations, collaboration, and commitment;
7. Innovation and creativity;
8. Assessment; and
9. Outcomes/performance.

There are two phases for evaluating the applications. The first one is done at the Award's offices by well-trained evaluators. During this phase, all the applications are graded according to a rubric set by experts in measurements and evaluation, which leads to the composition of a list of finalists ready for the second phase of evaluation. During the second phase, each of the finalists is visited by a committee of three to be observed in the classroom for one full day. During this visit, the committee meets with the teachers, principal, parents, and other people from the community, and also reviews all the documents the teacher mentioned in the application.

The national education strategy stresses the importance of involving students, teachers, principals, and the local community in the development and sustaining of an effective, safe, supportive, and healthy learning environment (Ministry of Education, 2006). The strategy also stresses the importance of partnerships between schools, parents, families, and local communities. Therefore, this study is motivated by the need to understand these partnerships, which can be examined by looking at standard number five of the Award, that is, teacher's relationships with the community and parents.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate and examine school-parents-community partnerships. There is not much research available on schools, parents, and community partnerships in Jordan. Also, many international studies view parental involvement as the most important aspect of such partnerships (Graham-Clay, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Rubin & Abrego, 2004; Sirvani, 2007). Therefore, this study has two major goals: first, to fill in some of the gaps in knowledge about school-parents-community partnerships in Jordan, and secondly, to add to the international literature on school-parents-community partnerships by looking at a dimension that is not getting enough attention from researchers (i.e., focusing on the role of the teacher in this partnership). More specifically, this study will answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers who received the QRA communicate with parents and the community?
2. What kind of volunteer work do teachers who received the Award pursue inside and outside the school?
3. How do teachers who received the Award encourage students to be more aware of social and community issues and then motivate students to be involved in the community?

## Previous Studies

A growing body of research shows that the involvement of parents and families in the schooling of their children makes a significant difference, not only in improving students' behavior and attendance, but also positively affecting student achievement (MetLife, 2005; Michael, Dittus, & Epstein, 2007). Regardless of income and background, students with parents who are involved in their academic careers are more likely to earn high grades, attend school regularly, show improved behavior, adapt well to school, and have better social skills; also, "parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 38). According to Henderson (1994) and Hatch (1998), parental involvement also has a positive impact on teachers (i.e., the teacher understands the child's home and cultural environment and feels supported), on schools (i.e., fewer discipline problems), and on parents themselves (i.e., improved confidence in the school and themselves). Some researchers, such as Eberly, Joshi, and Konzal (2007), point out the necessity of close relationships between families and teachers in order to understand each other's values and beliefs, so that each can create learning environments at home and at school that recognize the knowledge and practice of the other.

Several researchers have documented the challenges associated with school, family, and community partnerships. Rubin and Abrego (2004), for example, indicated that parents are not involved with their children's learning because of cultural and communication barriers; confusion with education jargon; feelings of inferiority, inhibition, inadequacy, or failure; lack of understanding of the school system; staff's lack of appreciation of the student's culture or language; and parents' previous negative experiences or feelings toward schools. Other researchers, such as Dodd and Konzal (2002), examined the success factors in school-parents-community relationships. They found that an open and trusting communication between teachers and parents is critical. This was also stressed by Sirvani (2007) who found a positive relationship in his study on the effect of teachers' communication with parents on students' mathematical

achievement. The study included 52 freshman high school students and compared the mathematics achievement of the students with involved parents with students whose parents were not involved. Sirvani found that those students with involved parents significantly outperformed the control group.

Attitude is another potential success factor. A survey of more than 400 parents of high school students in Maryland revealed that their attitudes toward their children's schools are positively influenced by efforts schools make to promote partnerships with them. Also, the parents are more likely to come to the school if school personnel encourage them to be volunteers and participate in decision making (Sanders, Epstein, & Connors-Tadros, 1999). School factors, specifically those that are relational in nature, have a major impact on parents' involvement. When school staff engage in a caring and trusting relationship with parents and view parents as partners in the education of their children, these relationships enhance parents' desire to be involved and influence how they participate in their children's educational development. Parents have to feel they are welcomed and respected, a terminology that Minuchin and Fishman (1981) called the *joining process* that consists of welcoming, honoring, and connecting. The process of welcoming created a sense of belonging, and this sense motivated parents to be more active in their children's schooling. In their 1997 study, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler created a model for parental involvement. One of the major influencing factors for greater parental involvement was an inviting climate at school, which refers to the frequency that schools actually invite parents to be involved in their children's schools and parents' perceptions of being welcome at school.

Epstein (1995) has identified six general types of activities that can help parents, schools, and communities come together to support children's education: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Partnership programs should draw on each of this elements, Epstein says, and design a program that takes into account the unique character of the local community and the needs of its students and families.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004), the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002) defines parental involvement as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (Sec. 9101 [32]). Parents, the law suggests, should be full partners in their child's education, play a key role in assisting in their child's learning, and be encouraged to be actively involved at school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2005), successful parent involvement can be defined as the active, ongoing participation of

a parent or primary caregiver in the education of his or her child. Parents can demonstrate involvement at home by reading with their children, helping with homework, and discussing school events and at school by attending functions or volunteering in classrooms. Schools with involved parents engage those parents, communicate with them regularly, and incorporate them into the learning process.

To widen the term “involvement,” it is used here to indicate not only parental but also community involvement. What applies to parental involvement is believed to be applicable to community involvement at large, including citizens other than students’ parents, non-governmental organizations, and local public institutions. Another related term that needs to be identified here is “community engagement.” According to Berg, Melaville, and Blank (2006), community engagement is defined as a two-way street with the school, families, and the community actively working together, creating networks of shared responsibility for student success. It is a tool that promotes civic well-being and that strengthens the capacity of schools, families, and communities to support young people’s full development. In recent years, research on school-community connections has tended to move from using the word “relationship” to the word “partnership” and from the notion of “parent as helper” to “parent as partner.” Partnership is a two-way street that embraces mutual benefits to all partners, and the research is focusing on what makes a successful school-community partnership. For example, Mapp (2002) sought to identify the factors that lead to successful educational partnerships between school staff and families in the Boston area to understand how and why parents were involved in their children’s education and what the parents’ believed were the helpful factors. Participating in school advisory councils, interview committees, or policymaking groups give parents ways to work with schools to solve problems and achieve common goals. Also, “effective partnerships between teachers and parents become even more essential to meet the needs of the children they ‘share’” (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 117). According to Ferriter (2008), it is important that teachers view parents as partners, and at the same time parents should recognize that teachers are professionals.

## **Methodology**

As previously discussed, this current study focuses on the fifth standard of the QRA – the relationship with community and parents. According to the Award’s rubric, this standard aims at identifying the procedures and methods that teachers utilize in order to inform parents about the behavioral and academic status of their children and also to involve parents in the learning

process. It also describes how teachers enhance a sense of societal belonging among children. This standard is measured by evaluating the following:

- Actions taken by the teacher to keep parents informed all the time about their child's performance and behavior and also to take advantage of the experiences and capacities of parents in the learning process.
- Supporting activities and volunteer work that the teacher performs to serve the local community and to raise students' awareness of local and international issues (environment, citizenship, globalization, diversity) and enhance their sense of belonging to their community.

The sample for this study consisted of 28 teachers who received the QRA in October 2007. The awardees included 5 male and 23 female teachers. Seven of the teachers taught (one of) grades 1-3, eight teachers taught from grade 4-7, six teachers taught from grade 8-10, five teachers taught grade 11 or 12, and two teachers taught in vocational schools. The Award's office provided the authors with a blind copy of the winners' responses on Award standard #5 which addresses the teachers' relationship with community and parents. Applicants were asked three open-ended questions to measure their relationship with the community and parents. They were asked about:

- The procedures they follow to keep parents updated regarding their child's performance/achievement/behavior;
- How they take advantage of the parents' skills in the teaching and learning process; and
- What supportive and voluntary activities they do to serve the community and to raise students' awareness of local and global issues, and how is this reflected in students' feeling of belonging to their community.

The applications were filled out in Arabic and were translated by the authors, who are native speakers of Arabic.

The data was analyzed by categorizing it around the three research questions: communicating with parents, volunteering, and encouraging and raising students' awareness of community issues. The responses were then grouped into categories and themes.

## Findings

The findings of this study are shown in Table 1. In answer to the first research question, "How do teachers who received the QRA communicate with parents and the community," three themes emerged from the applications of teachers: communicating with parents, involving parents in the learning process, and involving the community in the learning process.

Table 1. Categories and Themes Emerging from the Study

Category	Theme	Frequency
Communicating with parents	Phone calls	9 (31%)
	Reports	20 (69%)
	Individual meetings	19 (65%)
	Using technology	8 (27%)
	Teacher visits parents	4 (14%)
Involving parents in the learning process	Use of parents' skills	8 (27%)
	Ask parents to make donations	10 (34%)
	Invite parents to the classroom	7 (24%)
	Involve parents in the homework	5 (17%)
Volunteering	Teachers volunteer in the community	26 (89%)
	Teachers volunteer in schools	10 (34%)
	Community awareness (brochures)	9 (31%)
Community involvement	Community donations	5 (17%)
	Community participation in occasions	7 (24%)
Involve students in the community	Encourage students to volunteer	10 (34%)
	Lecturing	8 (27%)
	Site visits	9 (31%)

## Communicating with Parents

The study shows that teachers used a variety of methods to communicate with parents. These methods included phone calls, reports, meeting with parents individually, using technology, and visiting parents at home.

### *Phone Calls*

Nine teachers (31%) communicated with parents by phone. Most of the teachers called parents whenever there was a need, such as a decline in a child's performance or whenever a child made problems or behaved inappropriately in the classroom or in school. Teachers also called parents in order to encourage them to follow up and help their child with homework.

### *Reports*

Sixty-nine percent ( $n = 20$ ) of the teachers communicated with parents by sending weekly, monthly, or per semester reports home. These might be grade reports that parents were asked to approve and sign, in order to make sure the children showed their grades to their parents. Some teachers prepared folders which included samples of the student's work and grades and regularly sent the folders to the parents so that they could monitor their child's progress. As one kindergarten teacher said, "There are cards that monitor the child's development, physical health, and religious knowledge that we fill out and send to parents so they can monitor the progress of their kids." The purpose of these reports is to keep parents updated regarding their child's academic progress and achievement. Also, these reports are one way to inform parents of the academic and behavioral status of their children.

### *Use of Technology*

Eight teachers (27%) communicated with parents via the use of EduWave.<sup>3</sup> The teachers created passwords for parents so they could access their child's grades online. These teachers all taught grades 6-12; none of the teachers of early grades used this communication channel.

### *Meetings with Parents*

Individual meetings with parents were mentioned by teachers ( $n = 19$ ; 65%) as another way to communicate with parents. These meetings could be on a regular basis or at the beginning of the semester to get to know parents and to talk about their child and his or her academic status. These meetings could be initiated by parents or by teachers. A classroom teacher said that she met regularly with parents "by organizing a workshop called 'the door to success' in which the counselor, the principal, and other teachers participate in a dialogue with parents on the best ways to deal with low student performance." Some of these meetings took place whenever there was an urgent need.

Another way to meet with parents, although it was mentioned by only three teachers, was visiting parents in their homes. Those teachers who reported visiting parents did so mostly to show sympathy for a death in the family, but one teacher mentioned that she visited different parents each month.

## **Involving Parents in the Learning Process**

### *Use of Parents' Skills*

As shown in Table 1, 27% ( $n = 8$ ) of teachers reported that they took advantage of parents' skills and capacities in order to improve students' skills and knowledge. Teachers benefited from parents in several ways. For example, one

teacher said, “I asked a parent who is a carpenter to make boards and boxes for activities. And another parent made masks for students to be used in an acting performance.” One parent hosted students at the mosque and taught them how to pray. Another mother invited children to her farm to see the animals there. One parent who works in agriculture helped in designing a small garden for the school. One science teacher involved parents in a recycling project, saying, “Each student has to prepare a project with the help of her parents. This enhances the relationship between the parents-daughter on one hand, and school-parents on the other hand.”

### *Parents' Donation*

Occasionally, teachers also depended on parents' donations and help. Ten teachers (34%) mentioned that they received donations from parents. For example, a drama teacher mentioned that “parents provide services such as designing the décor and accessories for the play.” A tenth grade geography teacher said that he collaborates with parents who work at the Royal Geographic Center or the Department of Statistics to provide him with maps and brochures to be used in his class. A vocational education teacher explained the benefits of parents' donations: “[B]ecause of communicating with parents, I was able to receive some instruments, maintenance books, and other stuff that helped me in training students.”

### *Involve Parents in Homework*

Another way of involving parents in the learning process is by involving them in the homework of their children. Few teachers (5 out of 28; 17%) involved parents in their children's homework. As one English teacher explained, “I involve parents in the learning process by asking them to help their kids with their homework, because I am convinced that students' performance improves when parents are involved in their education.”

### **Community Involvement**

Twelve teachers involved the community in the learning process in two different ways. The first way was by inviting the community to participate in celebrating the national and religious occasions recognized in schools and asking specialists from the community into the school, such as the physician from the local health center, dentists, religious lecturers, or traffic specialists. The second way of involving the community was by asking them to make donations to the school, for example, one teacher asked the municipality council to provide trash bags to the school.

## Teachers as Volunteers

Regarding the second research question, “What kind of volunteer work do teachers who received the Award pursue inside and outside the school?”, three themes emerged: teachers volunteer in the community, volunteer in the school, and prepare brochures to raise community awareness of social issues.

### *Volunteering in the Community*

Almost all teachers ( $n = 26$ ; 89%) did some kind of volunteer work in the community. The kind of volunteer work pursued by these teachers included:

- Organizing workshops for the community on how to deal with children;
- Training the community on the International Computer Driving License (ICDL);
- Organizing cleaning campaigns in the village and painting street curbs;
- Preparing bulletins and brochures to raise awareness in the community of the importance of voting for Petra<sup>4</sup> and brochures about the constitution, bird flu, and so on;
- Cleaning and doing maintenance to the nearby mosques and charity organizations;
- Helping farmers in the collection of olives; and
- Organizing a workshop for mothers on how to prepare dairy products and pickles. (The same teacher also designed a brochure on medical wastes and raised awareness of health issues in the community.)

### *Volunteering in the School*

This study found that 10 teachers (34%) did some kind of voluntary work in their schools. This work included:

- Planting trees in the school’s garden;
- Teaching crafts and fine arts during summer school;
- Training the school’s athletic team;
- Buying a microphone and amplifier for the school’s morning program;
- Training Arabic teachers in the district on how to do content analysis;
- Organizing workshops in collaboration with the Ministry of Water on water conservation.

## Involving Students in the Community

Regarding the third research question, “How do teachers who received the Award encourage students to be more aware of social and community issues, and how do they motivate students to be involved in the community?”, three themes emerged from the study. These included encouraging students to volunteer, raising students’ awareness of issues through lecturing, and visiting local sites.

### *Students as Volunteers*

Ten teachers (34%) who taught grades 4-11 encouraged students to do volunteer work in the community. Such activities included participating in cleaning campaigns, such as cleaning the playground or the mosque. Teachers had also encouraged students to help families collect olives during the harvesting season or to collect things they do not need and donate them to needy families.

### *Lecturing*

Twenty-seven percent of the teachers (8 out of 28) were able to raise students' awareness of issues such as traffic safety, the constitution, citizenship, voting for Petra, water conservation, and children's rights. One fourth grade science teacher said, "I teach kids about tolerance and how to respect other religions and all prophets."

### *Site Visits*

Involving students in site visits is another way to raise students' awareness of the community. Nine teachers (31%) mentioned that they took students on site visits. These included visits to archaeological sites, museums, parks, and natural conservatories. One tenth grade English teacher explains, "I took students to visit Princess Raya Hospital and discuss some health and environmental issues with the director of the hospital and also to get to know the different parts of the hospital. At the end of the visit, students visited some patients."

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The current study aims to identify the ways in which teachers who received the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education partnered with parents and the community. The study revealed that there were five ways by which these distinguished teachers connected with parents and the community, including: communicating with parents, involving parents in the learning process, involving the community in the school, volunteering, and involving students in the community.

Teachers in this study communicated with parents through both interactive (via phone, meetings, technology, and visits) and non-interactive (via reports) means. The most popular means of communication was via sending progress reports to parents (69% of teachers) followed by individual meetings with parents (65% of teachers). Meetings are a very important and effective method of communication in which teachers and parents engage in a dialogue with each other in the interest of the child. It is important to stress here that these meetings should be viewed as an opportunity to discuss what is working with these

students and not to focus only on what is not working in school. Another type of two-way communication is using the telephone. Some teachers (31%) reported placing calls to parents, mainly when children misbehave or when they receive low grades. Although it is important to share a concern about the child, which can be a source of tension for both teachers and parents, it is also necessary to call parents to recognize the child's progress or a job well done, which Love (1996) called the use of "good news calls." According to Love, this will promote positive relations with parents.

The study also found that teachers communicated with parents via technology, which refers here to the use of e-mail and the teachers' portal (EduWave). About a quarter (27%) of the teachers studied sent and/or exchanged e-mails with parents. Those teachers who are trained and have access to internet can provide updates that are easily accessed by parents regarding homework assignments, test schedules, resource links, and so on. It is important to point out, however, that not all families have a computer at home, and those who have one do not necessarily have access to the internet. Access also varies according to geographical location. For example, families in rural areas have less access to internet at home compared with those who live in urban areas.

The study found that teachers involved parents in the learning process in several ways, including the use of parents' skills, asking parents to make donations to be used by the teacher, inviting parents to the classroom, and involving them in their children's homework. These are important means of parental involvement, and it indicates that teachers view parents as partners who accept such responsibilities for the sake of their children. Parents are considered important resources that can be utilized by teachers. Parents have skills, capacities, money, time, and experience that help in promoting the learning process. When teachers ask parents to visit the classroom and help them in the class, this makes parents feel they are important and also makes them feel more responsible toward their children and toward the school. The literature listed in the introduction clearly shows several advantages when parents are involved in the learning of their children. Teachers who were examined in this study seemed to realize this, as they are already involving parents in many ways.

Regarding teachers' volunteerism, the findings were interesting and unexpected. Almost all these teachers did some kind of volunteer work. Volunteering in Jordan is still not instilled in the culture, and it is not institutionalized (Obeidat & Al-Hassan, 2007). Thus, this volunteerism is something that makes these teachers distinguished. The variation of the kind of volunteer work pursued indicates a high degree of awareness by those teachers who used their skills and knowledge to serve the community and the schools. This shows a sense of belonging to the school and community, which also should be reflected inside

the smaller community of the classroom. Not only do the teachers volunteer, but they also involve students in the community. This involvement takes three shapes: encouraging students to volunteer, joining students during site visits, and raising students' awareness of community-related issues. All of these methods for student involvement in the community, or what is commonly referred to as "service learning" (Abravanel, 2003), show benefits to both the school and community. Through service learning, students increase their sense of personal and social responsibility and are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors. Students see themselves as positive contributors to their community, feeling they can make a difference.

It is worth reporting that almost all these teachers are practicing and communicating in similar ways, regardless of the subject or grade they teach. The only exceptions were when it came to involving students in the community and communicating with parents via technology; these two activities were done by teachers who taught grade four and higher.

In conclusion, the findings of this study are in line with the findings of international research. Award-winning teachers realize the importance of keeping strong, close ties with their students' parents and the community; therefore, they connect with parents and the community in several ways. It is time to move into formalized partnerships with parents and the community and to work with other teachers in schools on parental and community involvement. Successful school-family partnerships require the sustained mutual collaboration, support, and participation of school staff and of families at home and at school in activities that can directly affect the success of children's learning.

It is also important that teachers create opportunities for parents and the community to be involved in the learning process. Parents and community members should not feel hesitant or unwelcome in the school. The schools most successful in engaging parents and other family members in support of their children's learning look beyond traditional definitions of parent involvement to a broader conception of parents as full partners in the education of their children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Finally, the study recommends that the challenges teachers face in their partnership with parents and the community are worth investigating in interviews with these teachers. In-depth qualitative studies are needed to understand and examine variations in parental and community involvement in schools across Jordan. Another interesting study might be to take an in-depth look at parents volunteering in school. If families are to work with schools as full partners in the education of their children, schools must provide them with the opportunities and support they need to succeed.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>For detailed information, please visit the Award's website: <http://www.queenraniaaward.org>

<sup>2</sup>JD 1= \$1.40 U.S. Dollars. This might not be seen as a large amount of money, but for a teacher in Jordan, this almost equals the sum of one's annual salary.

<sup>3</sup>EduWave is an e-learning platform that is used in Jordanian K-12. It is an instructional content and learning management solution that caters to virtually every aspect of the educational cycle. Through EduWave, teachers have the ability to communicate their views and concerns directly to their students, colleagues, administration, and parents through e-mail and discussion forums.

<sup>4</sup> In 2007, there was a national campaign to make sure Petra, the ancient Nabatian city located in the south of Jordan, was selected as one of the new Seven Wonders of the World, and it was selected.

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